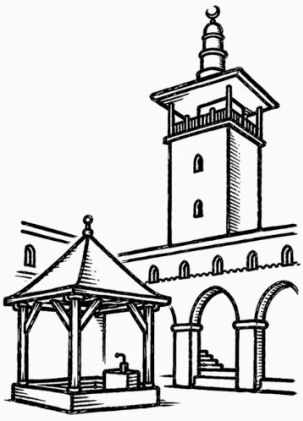
An Introduction to the Ḥanbalī Madhhab

A Summary of
The Foundational Principles of the Ḥanbalī Madhhab
by
Shaykh Yūsuf Ibn Sādiq al-Ḥanbalī



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In the name of God, al-Raḥmān, al-Raḥeem

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Preface

All praise belongs to Allāh, Lord of the worlds, and may prayers and peace be upon our Prophet Muḥammad, his family, his companions, and all those who follow them in goodness until the Day of Judgement.

This is a summary (mukhtaṣar) of the book and a general explanation of the Topics found in *'The Foundational Principles of the Hanbali Madhhab'* by *Shaykh Yusuf Ibn Sadiq al-Hanbali.* It aims to be a simple introduction for those who want to understand the Ḥanbalī madhhab beyond merely knowing isolated rulings.

This is not presented as an independent scholarly work, nor as a claim of authority. Rather, this work, along with my other works, is a personal passion project that I have published because I believe there is benefit in it, and I wish to share that benefit with others.

Whatever is correct is from Allāh alone, and whatever is incorrect is from myself, my ignorance, and Shayṭān.

I hope and ask Allāh to accept it, place benefit in it, and make it a means of reward, a means of expiation for my sins, and a ṣadaqah jāriyah for me.

The purpose of this book is to give the reader a clear introduction to how the Ḥanbalī madhhab works, how it developed, and how it should be studied. It is not only about knowing individual rulings. Rather, it is about understanding the structure of the madhhab, its terminology, its scholars, and the method by which its rulings were transmitted, revised, and relied upon.

Uṣūl al-Madhhab

When we speak about *uṣūl al-madhhab*, we are speaking about the general principles of the school. These are the principles that show us how the madhhab works and how the madhhab thinks.

This is one of the most important topics a student of knowledge can learn about his school.

Knowledge of this is very hard to find in the Ḥanbalī madhhab, let alone in English. There are also very few Ḥanbalī scholars today. Even some of the scholars who present themselves as Ḥanbalī may not know some of this information, as they may have only studied the fiqh rulings or the ʿaqīdah positions.

As Shaykh Yūsuf says:

"If someone is Ḥanbalī, it is in their blood and in their bones. There is a way that the madhhab is learnt, and it is not just about the end positions.

We have very few people who have learnt the Ḥanbalī madhhab authentically and organically, according to the way it has always been learnt. However, we have a lot of people who adopted the Ḥanbalī madhhab's positions later in life. By doing that, they arrived at those positions in a very non-traditional way. Therefore, they are not always the best qualified to explain how the madhhab works.

They can explain the positions, but they may not be able to explain the inner workings of the madhhab. They may not have an appreciation for the philosophy of the madhhab, meaning how the madhhab thinks and the context of the madhhab.

As was said, this needs to be in the bones. Meaning, it can only come from someone who has learnt the madhhab properly and traditionally."

Why Do We Need to Know This?

Nowadays, a lot of people, despite learning fiqh or ʿaqīdah according to a madhhab, straight away want to know about topics such as jihād, or whether they can make ijtihād, or whether they can authenticate aḥādīth.

They ask, *"What is the evidence for this? I want to know the evidences."*

These questions are not wrong in themselves, but many people deceive themselves into thinking that, if someone gives them the evidence, they now know the evidence. In reality, all they know is something related to the evidence.

This is an example of what is often more interesting to people than knowing the dry ʿilm, meaning the raw knowledge of the madhhab.

This type of knowledge is not very spicy or controversial, so many people may not find it interesting.

Dry ʿilm includes things like:

- Names and dates of death of scholars.
- Books and who authored them.
- Who authored the explanation.
- Who authored the commentary.
- Which books are used to find the relied-upon position, meaning the muʿtamad.

Unless you actually have an interest in the madhhab, or you want to study it properly, you may not be interested in topics like this and may find them quite boring.

The result is that many people only know the rulings of fiqh, ʿaqīdah, and other subjects, but they do not know the uṣūl, phases, methods, and structure behind those rulings.

So the reason, alḥamdulillāh, that we have access to this knowledge is because of Shaykh Yūsuf, his mashāyikh, and his peers, who have done much of the hard work for us. We are then able to benefit from their work and bypass a lot of the effort they already put in.

Studying Under a Shaykh

This takes us to another important point: ʿilm (knowledge) has to be taken from a qualified Shaykh.

Even if someone has a qualified Shaykh teaching them, it does not necessarily mean that he or she will reach scholarship or even reach a high level of ʿilm.

So what can be said about someone who tries to learn a madhhab by themselves, especially something like the Ḥanbalī madhhab, which does not have a lot of people teaching it?

What can be said about someone who opens the books and tries to reach a high level of ʿilm by themselves?

This shows the importance of taking knowledge from qualified shuyūkh.

The Phases of the Madhhab

The history of the Ḥanbalī madhhab is divided into three main phases:

- The phase of the **Mutaqaddimīn**
  (The early phase of the madhhab)

- The phase of the **Mutawassiṭīn**
  (The middle phase of the madhhab)

- The phase of the **Mutaʾakhkhirīn**
  (The late phase of the madhhab)

The start and end of these phases is not completely clear cut. This is a topic in which scholars use their ijtihād (reasoning), meaning that some scholars may propose a beginning, middle, and end for these stages which may differ from another scholar's division.

In this work, we will follow Shaykh Yūsuf's opinion and ijtihād on when these phases start and end. However, it should still be remembered that the start and end of these phases is not completely clear-cut.

Imām Aḥmad, may Allāh have mercy upon him, is not considered part of any phase himself. This is like the other Imāms of their respective schools, such as Imām Mālik, Imām al-Shāfiʿī, and Imām Abū Ḥanīfah, may Allāh have mercy upon them all.

The four mujtahid (those who can form their own rulings) Imāms are the foundations of their madhāhib. They are the sources of their madhāhib, so they are not considered a phase within themselves.

The Mutaqaddimīn

The phase of the Mutaqaddimīn begins with Imām Aḥmad's own students align with their students.

Among the most famous are his two sons:

- **Ṣāliḥ ibn Aḥmad**, who died in 265 AH.
- ʿ**Abdullāh ibn Aḥmad**, who died in 290 AH.

Other major figures include:

- **Al-Athram**, who died in 273 AH.
- **Al-Marwadhī**, who died in 290 AH.
- **Abū Dāwūd**, who died in 275 AH.
  (He was one of Imām Aḥmad's best students and authored the famous ḥadīth collection, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*.)
- **Abū Bakr al-Khallāl**, who died in 311 AH.
- **Al-Khiraqī**, who died in 334 AH
- **Ibn Ḥāmid**, who died in 403 AH.
- **Al-Qāḍī Abū Yaʿlā**, who died in 458 AH.
  (He was the most famous student of Ibn Ḥāmid.)

The Main Feature of This Phase

This was the phase of transmission, collection, and compilation of what came from Imām Aḥmad.

Imām Aḥmad would give fatāwā, legal verdicts, and he would speak about the Sharīʿah. His statements, actions, and answers were then transmitted from him to his students, then from his students to their students, and then to the generations after them.

These matters were collected and compiled. These compilations are what are known as the masāʾil of Imām Aḥmad.

Some people who heard these transmissions took it upon themselves to collect them. For example, Abū Bakr al-Khallāl compiled *al-Jāmiʿ*

li-ʿUlūm al-Imām Aḥmad, a massive book containing the masāʾil of Imām Aḥmad.

This is not the same *al-Jāmiʿ li-ʿUlūm al-Imām Aḥmad* that we see today however, as the one by al-Khallāl is not entirely existent anymore.

You will see this a lot with the Ḥanbalī madhhab, many of the early books have been lost.

We also have *al-Jāmiʿ fī al-Madhhab*, authored by Ibn Ḥāmid, in which he collected the opinions, or the masāʾil as we call them, of Imām Aḥmad.

Also during this phase, we see the first fiqh manual of the Ḥanbalī madhhab, which was called *Mukhtaṣar fīl-Fiqh*, authored by al-Khiraqī.

This later became famously known as *Mukhtaṣar al-Khiraqī*. It has had many commentaries written on it, and it became one of the most commented upon books in the Ḥanbalī madhhab.

As we can see, the scholars of this phase lived very close to the time of Imām Aḥmad, who died in 241 AH, may Allāh have mercy upon him.

According to this division, the phase of the Mutaqaddimīn ends with al-Qāḍī Abū Yaʿlā.

The Mutawassiṭīn

So al-Qāḍī Abū Yaʿlā ends the Mutaqaddimīn phase, and he had a very important student called Abū al-Khaṭṭāb al-Kalwadhānī, who died in 510 AH. He begins the phase of the Mutawassiṭīn.

Its scholars include:

- **Abū al-Khaṭṭāb al-Kalwadhānī**, who died in 510 AH
- **Abū al-Wafāʾ ibn ʿAqīl**, who died in 513 AH
- **Sayyidī ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī**, who died in 561 AH
- **Ibn al-Jawzī**, who died in 597 AH
- **Taqī al-Dīn ibn Taymiyyah**, who died in 728 AH
- **Shams al-Dīn ibn Mufliḥ**, who died in 763 AH
  (Student of Ibn Taymiyyah)
- **Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī**, who died in 795 AH

Also within this phase we have *The Shaykhān*, meaning the two Shaykhs:

- **Majd al-Dīn ibn Taymiyyah**, who died in 652 AH.
  (He was the grandfather of the famous Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah.)
- **Muwaffaq al-Dīn ibn Qudāmah al-Maqdisī**, who died in 620 AH.

They are known as the Shaykhān of the Ḥanābilah because they were two of the greatest authorities in the madhhab whose knowledge, works, and influence gave them a special rank among the Ḥanbalī scholars.

Similar to how the scholars of ḥadīth have their Shaykhān, meaning Imām al-Bukhārī and Imām Muslim.

The Main Feature of This Phase

This phase ends with Shams al-Dīn ibn Mufliḥ, who authored some important books of the madhhab.

This phase is where we see the formulation and reduction of the madhhab from the material gathered by the previous generations.

The earlier scholars collected the narrations, masāʾil, and material from Imām Aḥmad. Then the scholars of this phase began to work on that material.

- They began to filter it.
- They began to verify it.
- They began to formulate it into fiqh manuals and other books.
- They began to edit and refine what needed to be edited and refined.

In other words, they were not simply compiling material. Rather, they were starting to work with that material and turn it into developed works. They refined it, organised it, and formulated it into books that could be studied.

The Mutaʾakhirīn

The phase of the Mutaʾakhkhirīn begins with the students of Shams al-Dīn ibn Mufliḥ, and it continues to the present day.

Some famous scholars from this phase include:

- **Imām al-Mardāwī**, who died in 885 AH
- **Imām al-Ḥajjāwī**, who died in 968 AH
- **Ibn al-Najjār al-Futūḥī**, who died in 980 AH
- **Shaykh Marʿī ibn Yūsuf al-Karmī**, who died in 1033 AH
- **Shaykh Manṣūr al-Buhūtī**, who died in 1051 AH
- **Al-Khalwatī**, who died in 1088 AH
  (nephew and primary student of al-Buhūtī)
- **Ibn Qāʾid al-Najdī**, who died in 1097 AH
  (student of al-Khalwatī)
- **Ibn ʿAwaḍ**, who died in 1140 AH
  (student of Ibn Qāʾid al-Najdī)

The Main Feature of This Phase

In this phase, the tanqīḥ of the madhhab takes place, meaning the revision of the madhhab. The taḥqīq also takes place, meaning the verification of the madhhab.

In this phase, we begin to see very developed fiqh manuals forming.

- The scholars revised parts of the madhhab.
- They verified the authentic from the weak.
- They revised and came to the final rulings of the madhhab, so to speak.

This is where the muʿtamad position, meaning the relied-upon position, becomes very important. We will speak more about the muʿtamad later on.

In this phase, the madhhab reaches its peak in terms of revision, verification, and settled reference works.

The process of revision reaches its peak with Imām Ibn al-Najjār al-Futūḥī and Imām al-Ḥajjāwī, who authored the primary reference works for the Ḥanbalī scholars after them.

- Ibn al-Najjār authored the famous *Muntahā al-Irādāt*.

- Imām al-Ḥajjāwī authored the famous *al-Iqnāʿ*.

These two books are the two primary reference works for the relied-upon position, the muʿtamad, in the madhhab.

Later, Shaykh Manṣūr al-Buhūtī wrote some of the most famous commentaries within the madhhab. So you have the most famous books in the madhhab, and then some of the most famous explanations/commentaries on them authored by Shaykh Manṣūr al-Buhūtī and further explanations/commentaries written on them by al-Buhūtī's students.

It is at this stage, with the books of Shaykh Manṣūr al-Buhūtī, that the madhhab finally settles. His books form a major part of the curriculum for learning the madhhab.

This phase also contains what we call the Ḥanbalī Golden Chain, which we will discuss soon.

Some have suggested that there is a post-Mutaʾakhkhirīn phase. However, Shaykh Yūsuf does not agree with this.

He says that there is nothing happening now that was not already happening since the start of the Mutaʾakhkhirīn phase. For us to call something a post-Mutaʾakhkhirīn phase, there would need to be unique factors or something happening in that phase which differentiates it from the previous phase.

However, there is nothing we can see happening now that was not already happening in the Mutaʾakhkhirīn phase. If someone says, *"There is further editing and further verification,"* then we say that this is not something new. Editing and verification have been happening since the start of the phase of the Mutaʾakhkhirīn.

The Ḥanbalī Golden Chain

Some scholars in this phase form part of what is called the Ḥanbalī *Silsilah Dhahabiyyah*, meaning the Ḥanbalī Golden Chain.

You may have heard of golden chains in different sciences. For example, in ḥadīth there is the famous golden chain of Mālik, from Nāfiʿ, from Ibn ʿUmar.

In the Ḥanbalī madhhab, there is also a golden chain:

- **Imām al-Buhūtī**
  ↓
- **Al-Khalwatī** *(nephew and primary student of al-Buhūtī)*
  ↓
- **Ibn Qāʾid al-Najdī** *(student of al-Khalwatī)*
  ↓
- **Ibn ʿAwaḍ** *(student of Ibn Qāʾid al-Najdī)*

The common point between these four scholars is that they were all based in Egypt at some point. Not all of them were originally from Egypt, but they were all based there at some stage.

When we speak about the relied upon position we will explain this in more detail.

Terminology of the Scholars

These three phases contain many scholars in each phase.

These scholars refer to each other as aṣḥāb, meaning companions. This is a term that the Ḥanbalī scholars use for each other, regardless of when they lived.

For example, they may say, *"This person is from the aṣḥāb of Imām Aḥmad."* This does not necessarily mean that this person met Imām Aḥmad. Rather, it is a technical term within the madhhab.

It is not the same as when someone says, *"This person was a ṣaḥābī of the Prophet ﷺ."* A ṣaḥābī is someone who met the Prophet ﷺ and died upon Islam. That is a different usage of the word.

So when you see scholars referring to other Ḥanbalīs as *"from our aṣḥāb"* or *"min aṣḥābinā,"* they are referring to other scholars of the madhhab, regardless of whether they met them or not, and regardless of whether they met Imām Aḥmad or not.

It is simply a term that the Ḥanbalī scholars use for each other.

However one can refer to others as *"his aṣḥāb"* or refer to others as *"aṣḥāb of the madhhab."* However, out of adab (etiquette), if one is not qualified, then naturally one should not ascribe himself to the aṣḥāb of the madhhab unless he is qualified to do so, such as if he has a recognised position within the madhhab.

The Riwāyah of Imām Aḥmad

A riwāyah is everything that Imām Aḥmad said or did.

Anything narrated about what he said or did is called a riwāyah.

The scholars of the Ḥanbalī madhhab consider anything that Imām Aḥmad said or did to be very important, because our whole madhhab is based on this.

Unlike the other madhāhib, the Ḥanbalī madhhab is especially concerned with what Imām Aḥmad said or did. In some other madhāhib, later scholars may differ with their Imām, and the opinion of those later scholars may become the official position of the school, even though it is different from the Imām's own opinion.

The Ḥanbalī madhhab is not like this. We are interested in Imām Aḥmad's opinion on a matter, which is why so much importance is placed on the riwāyah.

We would challenge anyone to find a single opinion in the history of the Ḥanbalī school where we have Imām Aḥmad's position and then find a Ḥanbalī scholar trying to overrule this with his own opinion and trying to make that the position of the school.

This shows the importance that the Ḥanābilah placed on the riwāyah throughout their history.

When Imām Aḥmad Says *"I Dislike It"*

One issue is that what Imām Aḥmad did is not always as clear as what Imām Aḥmad said.

For example, you may see that Imām Aḥmad says, *"Akrahu,"* meaning, *"I hate it"* or *"I dislike it."* Usually, this means prohibition. So when Imām Aḥmad says, "*I dislike this thing,"* or *"I hate this thing,"* it *usually* means that he is saying it is ḥarām.

Why would Imām Aḥmad not explicitly say, *"That thing is ḥarām"*?

Because he had waraʿ (scrupulousness). He did not want to use the words ḥalāl and ḥarām because making something ḥarām is a very serious matter.

So you find Imām Aḥmad and other scholars not always using the words ḥalāl and ḥarām. Instead, Imām Aḥmad may use the word *akrah*, meaning *"I hate"* or *"I dislike"*.

This is something that the Ḥanābilah understood. When Imām Aḥmad said this, it usually meant prohibition.

However, this does not mean that we can then go to the books ourselves, find where Imām Aḥmad said, *"I dislike this thing,"* and then deduce our own ruling.

This is a general principle, but it has exceptions. So we rely upon the scholars' explanation of what Imām Aḥmad said.

The point is that a qualified Ḥanbalī scholar understands what Imām Aḥmad means when he says, *"I dislike it."* He knows when Imām Aḥmad is saying that something is ḥarām.

Actions of Imām Aḥmad

This level of clarity is not always present when we have the action of Imām Aḥmad rather than his words.

When we only have an action, we have to ask: why did Imām Aḥmad do this?

Maybe the action was disliked but not ḥarām, and he did it for a valid reason. In the Ḥanbalī madhhab, the disliked can become permissible if there is a valid need.

For example, purely for the sake of explanation, let us say that Imām Aḥmad used to trim his eyebrows, and that is all we have. We do not have any statement from him about it. We only have the action.

Here we would ask: why did he do that?

Could it have been because the action was makrūh and not ḥarām, and he had a reason that made him need to do it? Or did he do it for some other reason that is not clear?

The principle here is:

- Disliked but not ḥarām = permissible if there is a need.

This example is only for explanation. It is not necessarily the position of the school. The point is simply that when we only have an action, it is not always clear what the impact of that action is.

We do not always have a definitive indication that leads us to what the Imām's position on the matter was.

So when we have a riwāyah of an action of Imām Aḥmad, it is not always clear what his ruling on the matter was.

The Ḥanābilah dealt with this in their books, such as books of fiqh and uṣūl al-fiqh. You will find the Ḥanābilah discussing the actions of Imām Aḥmad and determining what he meant.

As you can imagine, this is a complex process. It took many scholars and many years.

This shows us that we may not always have a definitive ruling simply because an action has been narrated from Imām Aḥmad.

So we have riwāyah (the sayings and actions of Imām Aḥmad), but we also have the sayings and actions of other scholars in the madhhab.

Multiple Riwāyāt

We can have multiple riwāyāt from Imām Aḥmad on the same issue.

Sometimes, in the books, you may find statements like, *"fī riwāyah yaṣiḥḥ,"* meaning, *"the correct ruling in a riwāyah is,"* and then they give the ruling.

This means that Imām Aḥmad may have held more than one opinion on an issue.

There is a beneficial book, or perhaps a PhD thesis (unsure which), by Dr Fayiz ibn Aḥmad Ḥāmid, called *Asbāb Ikhtilāf al-Riwāyah ʿan al-Imām Aḥmad*. In it, he discusses the reasons for differing riwāyāt from Imām Aḥmad.

Shaykh Yūsuf mentioned that the conclusions of the author are not always accurate, but the work is still beneficial because it shows some of the different riwāyāt and some of the quotes related to them.

So why would Imām Aḥmad have more than one riwāyah on an issue?

The most basic reason is that he was a mujtahid muṭlaq, meaning that he could independently reason using the Qurʾān and Sunnah. He could take rulings directly from the Qurʾān and Sunnah.

At one point, his ijtihād may have led him to one conclusion. At another time, his ijtihād may have led him to a different conclusion.

You can see this in some of the Ḥanbalī books. When a mujtahid is presented with a question, he has to answer from the Qurʾān, Sunnah, and other sources. He cannot simply rely on his previous ijtihād if the matter requires fresh consideration.

So at one time, he may have held one opinion on a matter, and at another time, he may have reached another conclusion.

Furthermore, Imām Aḥmad would give fatwā personally to people. Naturally, his answers would be based on the case of the questioner.

For example, if Questioner A is in a certain scenario and asks the Imām a question, the Imām answers him according to that scenario. Then Questioner B asks the same question, but his scenario is completely different, so the Imām may give a different answer.

This goes back to the overarching point, it is never acceptable to go to the riwāyāt of Imām Aḥmad without being qualified and without considering all these things we have discussed and what we will discuss after this.

Thankfully, these contexts were mentioned by the people who narrated the riwāyāt.

The Ḥanbalī scholars always considered the contexts. They considered what the earlier Ḥanbalī scholars understood from those contexts, and how they understood the riwāyāt.

One point to mention here is that the concept of nāsikh and mansūkh played an important role. These terms mean abrogating and abrogated.

As we said before, if we have an authentic riwāyah from Imām Aḥmad, that is the authentic position of the school. But what do we do when we have multiple riwāyāt from Imām Aḥmad on the same issue, same context, etc…?

We take the latest one. Some scholars say this to such an extent that the later position abrogates the previous one, to the point that the previous position does not even exist in the madhhab as the relied-upon position.

Of course, all the positions may still be narrated, and you may still see them in the books of riwāyāt. However, as we said before, it is dangerous for the unqualified to open the books of riwāyāt and try to determine which one is the correct ruling.

But generally the scholars say that the madhhab is what Imām Aḥmad died upon saying. Meaning, the relied-upon position will be the latest position that Imām Aḥmad had before he passed away, may Allāh have mercy upon him.

Authentication of Riwāyāt

The way the Ḥanābilah dealt with the riwāyāt of Imām Aḥmad is similar to the way the muḥaddithīn dealt with the ḥadīth of the Prophet ﷺ. Therefore, just as some ḥadīth are authentic and some are not, some riwāyāt from Imām Aḥmad are authentic and some are not.

They also understood that, just like the ḥadīth of the Prophet ﷺ, a riwāyah from Imām Aḥmad may be authentic or it may be weak.

The same types of principles were used:

- A sound chain of narrators.
- A fully connected chain.
- The narrators having righteousness and uprightness.
- Good memory.
- Trustworthiness.

The important point is that the narrations from Imām Aḥmad came like ḥadīth, meaning some could be weak, some could be authentic, and some could even be fabricated.

This is why the madhhab cannot be understood by simply opening a book and quoting a riwāyah. The riwāyah has to be understood through the scholars of the madhhab, their verification, their method, and their explanation.

This is one of the reasons why *ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīth* is so important.

Shaykh Yūsuf says that if someone is not studying ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīth, then he or she is wasting his or her time. He has a video about this on his YouTube channel, where he goes through the curriculum for ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīth, and he also teaches it at the madrasah.

So this is a small fāʾidah (benefit) here: because the Ḥanbalī madhhab is based on riwāyāt, a person should be strong in the *ʿulūm* (science) of ḥadīth, as the process is very similar.

Who Can Authenticate Riwāyāt?

Just like in ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīth, there are various factors that go into whether a ḥadīth is authentic or not. It is very similar with the authentication of the riwāyāt of Imām Aḥmad.

However, the difference here is that ijtihād in the matter of authenticating riwāyāt was limited to the very early stage of the Ḥanbalī scholars. This is the first phase of the madhhab, which ended with al-Qāḍī Abū Yaʿlā, the phase of the Mutaqaddimīn.

The knowledge and methodology of authenticating, criticising, weakening, or accepting the riwāyāt was limited to those early generations. This relied on similar principles to the scholars of ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīth.

We know that Imām al-Bukhārī, who died in 256 AH, and Imām Muslim, who died in 261 AH, were much more knowledgeable in the sciences of ḥadīth than later scholars such as Imām Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, who died in 852 AH, or Imām al-Dhahabī, who died in 748 AH.

There is not a comparison between al-Bukhārī and Muslim on one side, and Ibn Ḥajar and al-Dhahabī on the other, may Allāh have mercy upon them all.

Of course, Ibn Ḥajar and al-Dhahabī were still great scholars. However, the vast knowledge of the earlier scholars overcame the knowledge of the later scholars in this specific field. The reason the muḥaddithīn say that the early scholars were in the best place to judge narrations is not only because of their greater knowledge, but also because they had much closer, and in many cases first hand, experience with the narrators.

When Imām Ibn Ḥajar or al-Dhahabī looked at narrators, they relied on the books of earlier scholars who spoke about those narrators. However, when Imām al-Bukhārī and Imām Muslim judged narrators, they often knew many of them first-hand, or they read from other scholars of the time who were very close to those early narrators.

Similarly, we say that it is only the Mutaqaddimīn who had the scholarship, authority, experience, and qualification to judge the riwāyāt of Imām Aḥmad.

This process came to a close with the end of the phase of the Mutaqaddimīn. Therefore, because ijtihād in this matter is closed, nobody can come after this very early phase and start to re-evaluate the

narrations of Imām Aḥmad.

By the time of al-Qāḍī Abū Yaʿlā, who marks the end of the Mutaqaddimīn phase, the madhhab knew which narrations were authentic and which were not. The madhhab then based its opinions on these authentic riwāyāt.

Even if a major scholar such as Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah tried to re-evaluate narrations of Imām Aḥmad and tried to come up with different rulings in the madhhab based on those narrations, this was not something that the later Ḥanābilah accepted.

This knowledge was not passed on in that way. So, in a nutshell, no one other than that early stage of Ḥanābilah is able to re-authenticate or re-evaluate the narrations of Imām Aḥmad, not even Ibn Taymiyyah.

Why Is This Important?

This is important because knowledge of this should make us cautious. It should stop us from opening books of riwāyāt and taking rulings ourselves, or trying to judge these riwāyāt ourselves without looking at what the early scholars said.

Unfortunately, this needs to be said because this does happen. Some people who claim the Ḥanbalī madhhab will disagree with the muʿtamad and say, *"There is a riwāyah of Imām Aḥmad here,"* while disregarding the centuries of scholars who have already judged and worked on that riwāyah.

They then try to form fiqh positions based on their own evaluation of the authenticity of the riwāyāt.

But we know which riwāyāt are authentic by looking at which ones were used by the scholars. In other words, we see the authenticity through the application of the scholars of the madhhab. This also applies for books which aren't super reliable today, we can see what the scholars quote from them and judge them from that.

Ways of Establishing a New Riwāyah

Other than a riwāyah being clearly/directly narrated directly from Imām Aḥmad, there are other ways that riwāyāt from Imām Aḥmad can be established.

One of the ways is through qiyās, meaning legal reasoning. Just as scholars use qiyās in the Sharīʿah, the Ḥanbalī scholars also used qiyās to produce additional riwāyāt.

There are two main ways this can happen, and both use qiyās.

1. The first way is when we have an ambiguous statement of the Imām, meaning a saying, action, or statement that does not have a clear and definitive meaning.

   In this case, we can use a clear riwāyah to make the ambiguous statement clear, and from that establish a new riwāyah.

2. The second way is when we take the ruling of a similar issue for which we have a clear riwāyah.

   We then take that riwāyah and apply the ruling to a similar issue where we do not have a statement or action of the Imām regarding it.

In summary:

- The first way is making an ambiguous statement clear by using another clear riwāyah, then applying qiyās to establish a new riwāyah from the ambiguous statement.

- The second way is using a riwāyah from a similar issue where there is a clear and definitive riwāyah, and applying the same ruling to a similar issue for which there is no riwāyah at all.

Example of the First Way

Let us say Imām Aḥmad issues a fatwā saying, *"Drinking wine is ḥarām because it is an intoxicant."*

Somewhere else, Imām Aḥmad says, *"I do not prefer the usage of hashish,"* and this is all we have.

Linguistically, this is not perfectly clear. When he says, *"I do not prefer,"* does this mean it is makrūh? Does it mean ḥarām? Does it mean something else, such as a personal preference? We do not know from that statement alone.

So the scholars take the clear riwāyah: drinking wine is ḥarām because it is an intoxicant.

Hashish is also an intoxicant, so the reasoning is similar. They use the clear riwāyah to clarify the ambiguous statement.

They then deduce through qiyās that what he meant by, *"I do not prefer the usage of hashish,"* is that he prohibited it.

This then results in a riwāyah. The scholars can now say that we have a riwāyah from Imām Aḥmad that the consumption of hashish is ḥarām.

At the start, we had one riwāyah, the riwāyah about wine. Then we used that to clarify something ambiguous. From that, the scholars formulated a new riwāyah from Imām Aḥmad on the issue of hashish.

Example of the Second Way

Let us say that for issue Y, there is no clear riwāyah and no ambiguous statement.

However, we have a clear riwāyah for another similar issue (issue X), saying that issue X is makrūh.

A Ḥanbalī scholar after the time of Imām Aḥmad is asked about issue Y. If issue Y is identical or similar to issue X, then the scholar can apply the ruling of issue X to issue Y.

This is another way in which a riwāyah can be established through qiyās.

Differentiating Between Direct Riwāyah and Qiyās

Now we have seen that some riwāyāt were established and produced by later scholars after the time of Imām Aḥmad.

So how do we differentiate between a direct riwāyah from Imām Aḥmad and a riwāyah established through one of the methods mentioned above?

Within the books of the Ḥanābilah, they have terms such as naṣṣan or naṣṣa ʿalayhi, meaning that Imām Aḥmad explicitly stated it.

They use these terms to specify that this riwāyah is from Imām Aḥmad himself, meaning that it is clear cut and cannot be interpreted in another way.

So when you see naṣṣan or naṣṣa ʿalayhi, you know that this is from Imām Aḥmad directly.

However, if a riwāyah does not have this wording, it does not necessarily mean that it did not come from Imām Aḥmad directly. It simply opens up the possibility that it may be a riwāyah produced through qiyās.

These riwāyāt produced through qiyās are called riwāyah maqīsah.

Some Ḥanbalī scholars rejected this idea completely. They said that we cannot use qiyās to make new riwāyāt and then attribute them to the Imām.

They said that you can make qiyās, but you cannot call it a riwāyah. You can only call it a wajh.

However, this is the minority view. The majority of the scholars in the Ḥanbalī madhhab say that you can produce new riwāyāt through qiyās.

Then this majority is split into two camps.

One side says that the riwāyah produced through qiyās should be called riwāyah maqīsah.

The other side says that it is fine to call it a riwāyah alone.

So when you open a book of riwāyāt of Imām Aḥmad and see a riwāyah, it may be directly from him, or it may be from qiyās.

You may see some called riwāyah maqīsah, and you may see some simply called riwāyah. With the latter, you may not know immediately whether it came from Imām Aḥmad directly or whether it was established through qiyās.

The overarching point is that we cannot simply open books of riwāyāt and say, *"This riwāyah is correct,"* or, *"This is direct,"* or, *"This is authentic,"* or, *"This is Imām Aḥmad's riwāyah in this issue,"* or, *"This is what the position should be."*

This is something we see people doing on social media. We may even see scholars of other madhāhib almost abusing the Ḥanbalī madhhab in this way, by making posts saying, *"There is a riwāyah of Imām Aḥmad saying that this issue is permissible."*

But the question is, did they check whether this was a riwāyah of Imām Aḥmad himself? Was it established through qiyās? Was it the production of a later Ḥanbalī scholar? Did everyone after them agree that this can even be called a riwāyah?

These are all things that need to be checked.

This helps us understand the complexity and intricacy of the riwāyāt of Imām Aḥmad. It also strengthens the point that we should not open the books of riwāyāt and start giving weight to one riwāyah over another without looking at what the scholars said.

So now we do not only have the fact that Imām Aḥmad may have held multiple positions on an issue, but also riwāyāt added by other scholars through qiyās, but we also have

To the unqualified person, it will not be clear which one to take.

The Wajh of the Scholars

Although we said before that no one differs with Imām Aḥmad when his position is known, we still have opinions of other Ḥanbalī scholars.

Whatever comes from Imām Aḥmad will always be given preference over the opinion of other scholars.

What comes from other Ḥanbalī scholars, whether their opinion, their ijtihād, or the result of their ijtihād, is called a wajh (literally meaning 'face').

What comes from Imām Aḥmad is called a riwāyah.

However, a position is only treated as a riwāyah if that position was formed according to the uṣūl, meaning the principles, of the Ḥanbalī madhhab.

Remember: if there is a riwāyah from Imām Aḥmad on an issue, a wajh of another Ḥanbalī scholar will never overpower it.

This means that the muʿtamad of the school, meaning the relied-upon position, will be according to the riwāyah, not the wajh, in that issue.
In this day and age, some people try to equate the two. They equate the riwāyah and the wajh.

For example, they open the Ḥanbalī books and say, *"There is a riwāyah of Imām Aḥmad here, and there is a wajh of Ibn Taymiyyah here, and these two positions are of equal weight, so we can choose whichever one we like."*

This is incorrect.

As explained before, the weight of a riwāyah is always heavier than the weight of a wajh. We can never compare a wajh to a riwāyah of Imām Aḥmad as if they are equal in authenticity.

Takhrīj

We mentioned before what a wajh is. A wajh is an opinion of a Ḥanbalī scholar who performed ijtihād according to the Ḥanbalī uṣūl, meaning according to Imām Aḥmad's uṣūl.

This process of ijtihād, where a scholar produces an opinion in the school, is called takhrīj.

This is an important term. Takhrīj is when a Ḥanbalī scholar uses the uṣūl of the madhhab and produces a new opinion, when a scholar first does ijtihād, or goes through the process of takhrīj, he produces an opinion. This opinion is first called an iḥtimāl.

It is only after other scholars verify that it was produced using the Ḥanbalī uṣūl that it is called a wajh.

So it is not automatically called a wajh.

If I am a Ḥanbalī scholar and I produce an opinion, it is not automatically a wajh. It is first an iḥtimāl. Then, if my peers and the other mashāyikh of the madhhab scrutinise it and agree that it was formed using the Ḥanbalī uṣūl al-fiqh, it is called a wajh.

Before that, it is just called an iḥtimāl.

When we were speaking about the riwāyāt, we mentioned that some riwāyāt are established using qiyās. Similarly, some Ḥanābilah did ijtihād, and this process is called takhrīj. They ended up with opinions, and these opinions can also be called riwāyāt in some cases.

We said before that a riwāyah formed via qiyās can be called riwāyah maqīsah. Here, we can also call them riwāyah mukharrajah. Mukharrajah means a riwāyah produced using takhrīj.

Ijtihād in the Ḥanbalī Madhhab

When a Ḥanbalī scholar does ijtihād, or does takhrīj, and produces an opinion using the Ḥanbalī uṣūl, this opinion is known as a wajh in the madhhab.

This is why you find that some of Ibn Taymiyyah's opinions are accepted and some are rejected.

Sometimes he did ijtihād according to the uṣūl of the Ḥanābilah. In those cases, he formulated a Ḥanbalī opinion, which we call a wajh (or wujūh in the plural).

However, at some point he became a mujtahid himself, and he was not always relying on the school's uṣūl al-fiqh. At times, he was relying on his own uṣūl. Therefore, the opinions he formulated using his own uṣūl are not called wujūh in the madhhab, they are not Ḥanbalī positions.

They would not be called a wajh. They would be called the ikhtiyārāt, meaning the chosen or lone opinions of him.

A modern example of this is Ibn ʿUthaymīn. He has a famous book called *al-Sharḥ al-Mumtiʿ ʿalā Zād al-Mustaqniʿ*, in which he comments on the famous Ḥanbalī fiqh manual.

However, what you find is that he will quote the Ḥanbalī opinion and then say, *"This is the Ḥanbalī opinion, however my opinion is such-and-such, and I believe this is the stronger opinion."*

Ibn ʿUthaymīn, and even someone like Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān, do not generally present themselves as Ḥanbalīs in the strict madhhab sense. Yet many of their students may say that their opinions are also opinions in the Ḥanbalī madhhab because they read and commented on Ḥanbalī books.

So, if someone is not using the school's uṣūl and instead produces opinions that are not consistent with the Ḥanbalī school's uṣūl, then those opinions are not treated as Ḥanbalī opinions in the technical sense, even if they are mentioned while commenting on Ḥanbalī texts.

Even if the whole world agreed that a so and so was a mujtahid, his opinions would not automatically be Ḥanbalī opinions.

For an opinion to be a Ḥanbalī opinion, it must be produced according to the uṣūl of the Ḥanbalī madhhab.

If a scholar does not follow the uṣūl of the Ḥanbalī madhhab in producing an opinion, then his opinion is not called a wajh in the madhhab.

This is why it is incorrect to portray every opinion of a scholar who studied Ḥanbalī books as a Ḥanbalī opinion. The issue is not merely whether he read or explained Ḥanbalī books. The issue is whether the opinion was produced according to the uṣūl of the Ḥanbalī madhhab.

Why Have a Wajh?

A question may arise, why do we need wujūh if we have already said that, if Imām Aḥmad has an opinion on a matter and we have a riwāyah from him, then that is the madhhab?

Why did we need other Ḥanbalīs to exercise ijtihād and takhrīj?

The first answer is that there are some things that Imām Aḥmad did not speak about. If Imām Aḥmad did not speak about an issue, and a Ḥanbalī scholar is faced with that issue, clearly he needs to make ijtihād and produce a ruling.

But then why do we find Ḥanbalī scholars doing this even in matters where Imām Aḥmad already gave an opinion?

When the mujtahidīn, or those qualified to do ijtihād in the madhhab, produce more opinions, this enriches the general bank of fatāwā (rulings) in the madhhab.

This is important because a situation may arise where a qualified muftī (someone who gives rulings to people) needs to give somebody a different opinion, or a weaker opinion, which may not necessarily be Imām Aḥmad's opinion himself. Be it due to the questioner's context or another reason.

So it is better for the madhhab if more mujtahidīn produce opinions, even if those opinions are different to those of Imām Aḥmad, because there could be a time where another opinion is required.

This is something you hear a lot today: *"What is the other position in the madhhab?"*

However, this whole matter of using other opinions in the madhhab is only available for a qualified muftī. He is the one qualified in the madhhab to give a questioner a different opinion according to the circumstances.

It is not for us ourselves to do this, nor for ordinary students of knowledge, nor even advanced students of knowledge, unless they have reached the level of being qualified to do this.

Where there is a riwāyah from Imām Aḥmad, it will always overshadow the wajh of the Ḥanbalī scholars. However, what the scholars have done through producing wujūh is enrich the madhhab. In some cases, these opinions may be used by a qualified muftī, but they are added to

the general bank of the madhhab's fatāwā.

But in general, a riwāyah will always be stronger than a wajh.

There is one theoretical case where a wajh can be relatively stronger than a riwāyah. This is where, in one issue, we do not have a riwāyah from Imām Aḥmad, so a Ḥanbalī scholar exercises ijtihād and creates a wajh, and this wajh becomes the muʿtamad.

Then, in another separate and unrelated issue, we may have a weaker riwāyah which did not become the muʿtamad.

In that case, the wajh in the first issue is theoretically stronger than the riwāyah in the second issue, because the riwāyah in the second issue is relatively weaker when compared, since it is not the muʿtamad.

Practically, this has no real value because we are not comparing the same issue of fiqh. These two issues of fiqh have no relation to each other. However, this is something Shaykh Yūsuf mentioned regarding one of the ways a wajh can be relatively stronger than a riwāyah in its independent issue.

The Muʿtamad

Now we have mentioned the muʿtamad many times, so we need to speak about what it actually is, how it was formed, and the issues related to it.

The muʿtamad is simply the position that is relied upon in the school. It is the official position of the school.

It is the position that the Ḥanbalī scholars reached after a long process of collecting the various opinions of Imām Aḥmad, collecting the wujūh, researching the authenticity of opinions, combining some of them together if they were similar, differentiating between others, and reaching the most authoritative position in the madhhab.

The muʿtamad is not only based on riwāyāt. It also involves the wujūh of the great Ḥanbalī scholars, from all phases.

All of these scholars produced opinions in the madhhab.

The muʿtamad is the result the Ḥanbalī scholars reached after looking at all of these opinions and all of the riwāyāt, checking which ones are authentic, and then reaching what we call the muʿtamad.

The pinnacle of this process occurs in the phase of the Mutaʾakhkhirīn. This is the same in all the schools of fiqh.

So when we want to know what the muʿtamad is, we go to the later books. In our case, this means the books of the Mutaʾakhkhirīn, because these scholars developed this process over many years based on the work of the scholars before them, and the peak of that process was reached in their phase.

In fiqh we do not have the concept that older is always better.

When we want to know the official position of the school, we go to the later books. This is because the later scholars served the madhhab, built upon the work of previous generations, and preserved the input of those who came before them, and dealt with more issues and modern issues.

Later Scholars and the Muʿtamad

You will still benefit from the books of fiqh written by earlier scholars, but the madhhab has moved on and developed.

So when we learn fiqh, we usually go to the books of the Mutaʾakhkhirīn, because they respected the contribution and accumulation of the previous centuries of scholarship.

When someone says they will disregard the later books and go back to the earlier books, they are essentially disregarding hundreds of years, and in some cases over a thousand years, of scholars who produced the later books.

The Ḥanābilah exerted a lot of effort in identifying what the muʿtamad is, refining it, preserving it, and passing it down.

For this reason, the muʿtamad should be of great importance for someone who calls himself Ḥanbalī. He should know its value and its relevance.

If you want to gain more ʿilm (knowledge) in fiqh, then you learn the muʿtamad in more depth. You learn what it is, then you learn its evidences, then where it came from, and then how it developed. This is how one's knowledge deepens.

What you find nowadays is that people are often more interested in saying, *"Okay, that is the muʿtamad, but what is the other position?"* or, *"What did so and so say?"*

But this is not how ʿilm deepens, this is just following your desires.

What actually is the muʿtamad?

It is either Imām Aḥmad's own opinion, or it is the opinion that he would have given if he was asked that question.

In other words, the scholars are either giving you his opinion, which is the opinion of the school, or they are giving you what he would have said if he was faced with that question.

You will see this constant repetition and this constant importance given to the opinions of Imām Aḥmad. This is because this is Imām Aḥmad's school. It is the Ḥanbalī madhhab, the madhhab of Imām Aḥmad.

Unlike some other schools of fiqh, the Ḥanbalī madhhab was not really a collective effort in the sense of other scholars having an independent say in what the position of the school is. Rather, the effort of the scholars was directed towards trying to determine what Imām Aḥmad's position was, or what it would have been.

This is why it is problematic when people open books of Ḥanbalī fiqh, teach the Ḥanbalī position, and then say, *"But the rājiḥ (the stronger position) is something else,"* while still presenting themselves as Ḥanbalī.

There is an advanced topic on exactly how the muʿtamad is formed. For now, we will simply say that it is not a random process. There are various criteria and guidelines that govern the process of choosing what the muʿtamad is.

Respecting the Muʿtamad

If someone is true to himself and wants to be Ḥanbalī, then he should stick to the muʿtamad, learn it very well, know its value, and know its relevance.

This does not necessarily mean that positions other than the muʿtamad are weak in themselves. However, they will always be relatively weaker when compared to the muʿtamad of the school.

The muʿtamad is something that many scholars have agreed upon and identified as the official position of the school.

So when we acknowledge the muʿtamad but want to use another opinion because we personally feel it is stronger, we are almost disrespecting our own school.

If someone today says, *"This is the muʿtamad, but this is the stronger position,"* then we should remember that we ourselves, and anyone in this day and age, are insignificant compared to the centuries of scholars who agreed upon the muʿtamad.

Can we ourselves choose between different positions?

Here we mention the well-known position: the majority of scholars across the madhāhib of fiqh say that the layman does not need to follow a madhhab. This is also the official position of the Ḥanbalī school.

The layman's madhhab is the madhhab of the muftī or scholar he asks in an issue.

So someone who has not learnt fiqh, is not a scholar, and is not a shaykh, may have a question. He goes to someone he trusts, that scholar gives him a ruling, and he takes that ruling. He does not have a madhhab in the technical sense. He simply follows the ruling of the scholar he trusts.

However, a student of knowledge definitely needs to learn a madhhab. A student of ʿilm will not reach proficiency in fiqh, or any real level in ʿilm, unless he or she learns one madhhab and learns it well.

If you are sticking to a madhhab, then as much as you are able, you should also stick to the relied upon position of the school and apply it. It does not make sense to learn a position and then not apply it in your daily life.

Why is following the muʿtamad in most issues better for a student of knowledge?

Because it is taking the safer side in your religion.

We follow the opinions of Imām Aḥmad because we know he knew the Sunnah and the Sharīʿah extremely well, better than others. So the more we can follow exactly what he did or said, the safer it is for us in our religion.

As we said, the muʿtamad is either his own position or a position he would have held if he was asked. Therefore, we should try our best to follow it.

Also, what is the benefit of being a student of knowledge if we do not hold ourselves to a higher standard than the layman?

The layman has a question, asks a scholar, takes the answer, and moves on. But a student of knowledge should have a higher standard than this. He should learn methodologically, according to criteria, with qualified shuyūkh, and according to a proper process.

When a student is learning the madhhab and learning the muʿtamad, but makes it a habit to disregard the muʿtamad, this can lead to following desires.

He or she may know that X is the muʿtamad, but go to Y because it is easier. This is a dangerous habit.

It is foolish for someone to ascribe to a madhhab and then leave the official position of that school because he personally thinks another position is stronger.

If you think your opinion is stronger than the muʿtamad, then you are deluding yourself. Centuries of scholarship agreed that this is the position of Imām Aḥmad, and then a person who is most likely a muqallid (someone who doesn't understand or know the evidence and reasoning behind rulings so relies on scholars), nowhere near the level of a mujtahid, comes along and favours something over the muʿtamad.

If a person has an issue with the complex criteria used to reach the muʿtamad, such as the criteria produced by Imām al-Mardāwī, then by all means he may try to produce a different method. But his claim will not be heard unless he has the scholarship, authority, and qualification to do so.

Flexibility and Difficulty in Following the Muʿtamad

Having said all of this about the muʿtamad, we should also say that it is permissible, if someone has a need or difficulty, for him or her to go to a qualified scholar in the madhhab who can give them a different position based on their difficulty or need.

Also, what the scholar may do is find a different way to apply the muʿtamad that you had not thought of, instead of giving you a different ruling.

So the muʿtamad is not meant to create unnecessary hardship. Rather, it is the relied upon basis of the madhhab. When there is genuine difficulty, the matter should be brought to qualified scholars.

But in general leaving the muʿtamad is not something that any Ḥanbalī, or anyone who ascribes themselves to any school, should take lightly.

Where Can We Find the Muʿtamad?

The muʿtamad can be known quite easily in most issues by returning to a few important books.

The most important two are *al-Iqnāʿ li-Ṭālib al-Intifāʿ* by Imām al-Ḥajjāwī, one of the great scholars of the Mutaʾakhkhirīn.

And *Muntahā al-Irādāt fī Jamʿ al-Muqniʿ maʿa al-Tanqīḥ wa Ziyādāt*, more commonly known as *Muntahā al-Irādāt*, or simply *Muntahā*, by Ibn al-Najjār al-Futūḥī, who is also from the phase of the Mutaʾakhkhirīn.

As we mentioned before, the books of the Mutaʾakhkhirīn are where you will find the best and most precise rendition of the muʿtamad. This is because the positions had already been verified, developed, refined, and filtered.

So if you want to find the muʿtamad, you look to the later books, these specifically.

When al-Iqnāʿ and al-Muntahā Agree

When *al-Iqnāʿ* and *al-Muntahā* agree on a ruling, then more often than not, in the vast majority of cases, this means that the ruling is the muʿtamad.

If *al-Iqnāʿ* and *al-Muntahā* agree on something, this is taken as a very strong indication that it is definitely the muʿtamad, and the Ḥanbalī should stick to it.

They did disagree in some issues. Some scholars tried to count these disagreements. Some said they differ in 200 issues, some said 500, and some said much less.

However, the disagreements are still small compared to the overall number of issues. They are less than 5 or 10 percent, and we have a process of dealing with them.

This shows the strength of the muʿtamad. If these two books agree, then this is definitely the muʿtamad.

Sharḥ, Ḥāshiyah, and Other Levels of Explanation

The books *al-Iqnāʿ* and *al-Muntahā* have very important shurūḥ and

ḥawāshī.

Shurūḥ is the plural of *sharḥ*. A sharḥ is the first level of explanation on a matn (original text).

Ḥawāshī is the plural of *ḥāshiyah*. A ḥāshiyah is a further level of explanation like a commentary, either written on a sharḥ or directly on the matn.

Before discussing these books, it is useful to understand these terms.

The first level of explanation is the sharḥ

In a sharḥ, the scholar explains the matn, often word by word or phrase by phrase. You may see this done in different ways.

Sometimes the scholar takes part of the original matn, explains it in a few lines, then moves on to the next part. This is the conventional type of sharḥ.

There is also something called *sharḥ mamzūj*, meaning a mixed sharḥ. In this type of sharḥ, the scholar takes the original matn and incorporates it into his explanation. When you read a page of this kind of sharḥ, you will see that the scholar has blended the original matn into the explanation, almost making a new text altogether.

This takes a high level of scholarship because there are many rules that need to be followed. The scholar must avoid breaking the grammar and wording of the original text while still getting his point across. It is a technical exercise.

So these are two types of sharḥ.

- One is where the scholar takes a part of the matn, explains it, then moves on.

- The other is where the matn is brought into the sharḥ and read as though it is one text.

The sharḥ is the first level of explanation, and it is what really benefits the student, because the shaykh explaining the text usually explains every part of the matn.

The next level is the ḥāshiyah

A ḥāshiyah can sometimes be written on a sharḥ or just the matn. What the shaykh does is take parts of the sharḥ or matn and explain them further, or add additional points.

This is often very beneficial for a teacher who is teaching a class, because the author of the ḥāshiyah is not explaining everything. Rather, he is selecting certain points and expanding on them.

When scholars write a ḥāshiyah on a sharḥ, they almost treat the sharḥ as a new text or matn, then make points on it and explain parts further.

But the Ḥanābilah also have a tradition of writing ḥawāshī directly on original mutūn. So instead of consulting a sharḥ, they would take an original matn, like *al-Iqnāʿ*, and write a ḥāshiyah on it, selecting parts of that matn and mentioning additional benefits.

There are also other levels of explanation, such as taʿlīqāt and tanbīhāt. A taʿlīq is usually when parts of the matn or sharḥ are explained in footnotes. In a ḥāshiyah, the comments may be in the margins or within the text, whereas with a taʿlīq they are usually in the footnotes.

The Important Works on al-Iqnāʿ

Al-Iqnāʿ has one famous sharḥ. It is called *Kashshāf al-Qināʿ*, and it is by Imām al-Buhūtī.

You will see the name of Imām al-Buhūtī a lot in the Ḥanbalī madhhab.

Al-Iqnāʿ also has two famous ḥawāshī:

- *Ḥāshiyah al-Iqnāʿ* by Imām al-Buhūtī.
- *Ḥāshiyah* al-Khalwatī *ʿala al-Iqnāʿ* by al-Khalwatī, who was al-Buhūtī's student.

So from the three major explanations of *al-Iqnāʿ*, al-Buhūtī wrote two of them, and his student wrote the third.

The Important Works on al-Muntahā

Muntahā al-Irādāt has two very famous and important shurūḥ.

The first is the sharḥ of the author himself, Imām Ibn al-Najjār al-Futūḥī. He wrote a sharḥ to his own matn called *Maʿūnat Ūlī al-Nuhā Sharḥ*

al-Muntahā.

The second is another famous sharḥ, which today is probably the most relied upon sharḥ of *al-Muntahā*. It is called *Daqāʾiq Ūlī al-Nuhā li-Sharḥ al-Muntahā* by Imām al-Buhūtī. This is most commonly known as *Sharḥ Muntahā al-Irādāt*, or simply *Sharḥ al-Muntahā*.

Muntahā al-Irādāt also has three famous ḥawāshī.

- Imām al-Buhūtī has a ḥāshiyah on *al-Muntahā* called *Irshād Ūlī al-Nuhā*.

- Al-Khalwatī, al-Buhūtī's student, has a ḥāshiyah called *Ḥāshiyah al-Khalwatī ʿalā al-Muntahā*.

- Ibn Qāʾid al-Najdī also has a ḥāshiyah on *al-Muntahā*, simply called *Ḥāshiyah al-Muntahā*.

Out of these books, you can see that many were authored by Imām al-Buhūtī. This is why he is called the *shāriḥ* of the madhhab, meaning the explainer of the madhhab.

The settling of the madhhab reached its peak with Imām al-Buhūtī and his authorship of these very famous and beneficial books.

As we said earlier, in the Ḥanbalī madhhab, there is also a golden chain:

- **Imām al-Buhūtī**
  ↓
- **Al-Khalwatī** *(nephew and primary student of al-Buhūtī)*
  ↓
- **Ibn Qāʾid al-Najdī** *(student of al-Khalwatī)*
  ↓
- **Ibn ʿAwaḍ** *(student of Ibn Qāʾid al-Najdī)*

The first and most important figure in this chain is Imām al-Buhūtī. He is called the *shāriḥ* of the madhhab, because of how much he served the major relied-upon books, and the madhhab at the time of his and his students' explanations.

Then comes al-Khalwatī, who was the nephew and student of al-Buhūtī. He continued this service by writing ḥawāshī and further explanations connected to the same relied-upon works.

Then comes Ibn Qāʾid al-Najdī and then Ibn ʿAwaḍ, who wrote further

explanations and ḥawāshī.

When the Muʿtamad Is Unclear

In most cases, the muʿtamad can be found quite easily. However, there are times when the muʿtamad may be unclear.

This could happen for a few reasons.

One reason is when *al-Iqnāʿ* and *al-Muntahā* disagree on an issue. *Al-Iqnāʿ* may indicate that the muʿtamad is one thing, while *al-Muntahā* indicates something else.

This usually happens because the authors were unable to clearly identify the muʿtamad in that issue.

In such cases, some scholars hold *al-Muntahā* to a higher degree over *al-Iqnāʿ*.

Another case is when both books are silent on a matter.

This does happen. Although there are hundreds and hundreds of rulings in both books, there are still issues that may not be mentioned. For example, the issue of trimming the beard below the length of a fist in the Ḥanbalī madhhab.

In the Ḥanbalī madhhab, it is sunnah to let the beard grow, ḥarām to shave it completely, and permissible to cut what grows beyond a fist, as indicated by the report from Ibn ʿUmar.

You will find this in the famous books we have mentioned. However, what both *al-Iqnāʿ* and *al-Muntahā* are silent on is the issue of trimming what is less than a fist length.

For something like this, other books may be consulted. For example, a famous Ḥanbalī called Ibn Bahāʾ, who died in 900 AH, wrote a book called *Fatḥ Malik al-ʿAzīz*. In it, he says that trimming anything below a fist is makrūh (disliked).

By himself, he is not from the category of scholars where his claim automatically becomes the official position. However, other factors are taken into account, such as who else verified the position. In this particular case, there is some evidence that other shuyūkh listened to his opinion and agreed with him, and this position then became the relied upon position: that it is disliked to trim anything less than a fist

length.

The point here is not to focus on the ruling itself, but to show that there are times when *al-Iqnāʿ* and *al-Muntahā* may not mention something.

A final reason why the muʿtamad may be unclear is when the authors of *al-Iqnāʿ* and *al-Muntahā*, meaning al-Ḥajjāwī and Ibn al-Najjār, do not follow the methodology of Imām al-Mardāwī.

This is quite an advanced topic, and it occurs very rarely. Shaykh Naveed, who taught me this, mentioned that he does not remember Shaykh Yūsuf giving an actual example of this occurring. So it is almost a theoretical topic.

Imām al-Mardāwī and the Muʿtamad

Imām al-Mardāwī died in 885 AH, so he is from the Mutaʾakhkhirīn.

He had access to many books, many of which are listed in the introduction to his famous work *al-Inṣāf*. Many of these books are now lost.

What Imām al-Mardāwī did was develop a methodology to identify the muʿtamad of the school. It is a thirteen or fourteen step process, almost like a flow chart. If you follow those steps, you will reach the muʿtamad.

The scholars after him agreed with this methodology. They did not criticise it. They agreed that this was the correct methodology.

Then scholars like Ibn al-Najjār and al-Ḥajjāwī used this methodology to reach the muʿtamad. If they followed it properly, they would reach the muʿtamad as outlined by al-Mardāwī.

Imām al-Mardāwī is called the *munaqqiḥ* of the madhhab, meaning the verifier or reviser of the madhhab. He is the one who did *tanqīḥ*, meaning the verification and revision of the madhhab.

He authored three very important books in fiqh:

- *al-Inṣāf fī Maʿrifat al-Rājiḥ min al-Khilāf*.
- *Taṣḥīḥ al-Furūʿ*.
- *al-Tanqīḥ al-Mushbiʿ fī Taḥrīr Aḥkām al-Muqniʿ*.

These are the three famous fiqh books of Imām al-Mardāwī.

In *al-Inṣāf*, his first major work, he gathered the different authentic

opinions in the madhhab, whether they came from Imām Aḥmad or whether they were wujūh of the aṣḥāb of the madhhab.

In some issues, he starts to point out what the muʿtamad is. However, his main goal in this book is to gather the authentic Ḥanbalī positions. So if you open a page in *al-Inṣāf* and see him quote an opinion, this means it was an authentic Ḥanbalī opinion produced according to Ḥanbalī uṣūl. It is a wajh. However, it does not necessarily mean that it was the muʿtamad.

Secondly, he authored *Taṣḥīḥ al-Furūʿ*. This is his annotation on the famous *Kitāb al-Furūʿ* of Ibn Mufliḥ.

As mentioned earlier, Ibn Mufliḥ is the scholar who begins the phase of the Mutaʾakhkhirīn. In *Kitāb al-Furūʿ*, Ibn Mufliḥ gives what he thinks is the muʿtamad in many places. However, in some places, he does not do this.

What Imām al-Mardāwī does in *Taṣḥīḥ al-Furūʿ* is give the muʿtamad in the places where Ibn Mufliḥ did not.

His final book is *al-Tanqīḥ*. In this work, he comments on Ibn Qudāmah's *al-Muqniʿ*. Again, he does the same thing: in some places Ibn Qudāmah gives the muʿtamad, and in other places he does not, so al-Mardāwī gives the muʿtamad where Ibn Qudāmah did not.

The important thing to know about these three books is that he first authored *al-Inṣāf*, then *Taṣḥīḥ al-Furūʿ*, then *al-Tanqīḥ*.

Each one almost abrogates the previous one.

So if we want to know the position of Imām al-Mardāwī, we first go to the last book he authored, which is *al-Tanqīḥ*. If we do not find it there, then we go to *Taṣḥīḥ al-Furūʿ*. If we do not find it there, then we go to *al-Inṣāf*.

We should not do what many people do today, where they disregard his later books and his methodology, go straight to *al-Inṣāf*, and say, *"Look, he says here that this is the muʿtamad."*

This disregards the fact that he later authored two more books, and in many instances changed or refined what he previously said.

So, Imām al-Mardāwī developed a methodology to identify the muʿtamad of the school.

This is the stage where we really see the muʿtamad develop. The key point is that no recognised Ḥanbalī scholar after al-Mardāwī criticised this methodology.

So if someone wants to come along and say that the muʿtamad is not what the Ḥanābilah have held onto for many centuries, but is actually something else, then we say to him, *"show us your criteria that differs with the methodology of Imām al-Mardāwī, whose methodology no recognised Ḥanbalī scholar after him criticised."*

This concludes the discussion on the muʿtamad. We now know what it is, where we can find it, and how the scholars reached it.

The Mashhūr of the Madhhab

So far, we have taken some quite heavy doses of terminology and some quite complex concepts. We focused on opinions in the madhhab, such as riwāyāt and wujūh. Now we will begin to branch into other areas.

Before moving on, there is a small note connected to the muʿtamad. There is a term you may hear, or may have already heard, which is common in different Islamic sciences. In the Ḥanbalī madhhab, we have what is called the *mashhūr* of the madhhab.

Linguistically, *mashhūr* means well known or famous. However, it can also have a technical meaning according to the Ḥanābilah. This meaning depends on who is using the term and in which phase of the madhhab it is being used.

This is one of the reasons why it is important to know about the different phases of the madhhab. It may seem like an abstract concept at first. A person may ask, *"Why do we need to know which scholars were from which era?"* But it is for matters like this that knowing the phases becomes important.

If you know which phase a scholar belongs to, then when you hear him use a term like *mashhūr*, you can better understand what he means.

In the period of the Mutaʾakhirīn, the later Ḥanbalī scholars, if they use the phrase *mashhūr*, then more often than not, in most cases, it means the muʿtamad. So if you see them write *mashhūr*, this is usually taken as a synonym for muʿtamad.

However, if someone from the Mutawassiṭīn or Mutaqaddimīn uses this term, it does not necessarily mean the muʿtamad. Rather, it may simply mean the commonly held position at that time.

For example, there is the issue of human faeces and urine. The muʿtamad is that there is no difference between any najāsah, except for specific cases such as dog najāsah and similar issues. In the madhhab, to remove najāsah from clothing, a prayer space, or the skin, it requires seven washes with water. You will see this in more detail in the books of fiqh.

However, in the period of the Mutawassiṭīn, there was a mashhūr position that made a distinction between different types of najāsah. This distinction then resulted in different rulings. For example, if they distinguished human faeces as a different type of najāsah, they may

have concluded that a different process is required to remove it.

So we are not saying that, even during that time, this was the muʿtamad. Rather, we are saying that it was a commonly held, or famous, position at that time.

The muʿtamad later developed. So when the term *mashhūr* is used in the Mutawassiṭīn or Mutaqaddimīn phases, it is not necessarily used for the muʿtamad. Instead, it may be used more in its linguistic sense, meaning a well known, famous, or commonly held position.

This is why it is important to learn the phases of the madhhab.

Ẓāhir al-Madhhab

Another term you may hear is *ẓāhir al-madhhab*.

Ẓāhir means apparent. Technically, when something is described as *ẓāhir,* in this context, it means that this is the apparent position of the madhhab.

However, something being apparent does not necessarily mean that it is the muʿtamad.

So when you hear *ẓāhir*, it can also function as a synonym for *mashhūr*, depending on where in the history of the Ḥanbalī school the term is being used.

Again, this shows the importance of knowing the phases of the madhhab and the terminology of its scholars.

The Different Parts of the Ḥanbalī Madhhab

The Ḥanbalī madhhab, like the other madhāhib, is not only a madhhab of fiqh. It is made up of several sciences, and fiqh is only one of them.

All of these sciences need to be studied in a systematic way for a person to become properly grounded in the madhhab.

Some of the sciences within the Ḥanbalī madhhab include:

- **Uṣūl al-fiqh**
- **Qawāʿid**
- **Furūʿ**, *(the Rulings/Fiqh itself)*
- ʿ**Aqīdah**, *(also called uṣūl al-dīn)*
- **Taṣawwuf/Tazkiyah/zuhd**

Uṣūl al-Fiqh

Uṣūl al-fiqh is the study of the general evidences and principles that fiqh is based upon.

For example, in uṣūl al-fiqh we study matters such as commands indicating obligation.

If there is an āyah or ḥadīth commanding you to do something, the default is that this command indicates obligation.

Similarly, if there is a prohibition, meaning a command not to do something, the default is that this indicates prohibition.

Both of these have exceptions. A command may sometimes indicate recommendation, and a prohibition may sometimes indicate dislike rather than prohibition.

These are the types of matters studied in books of uṣūl al-fiqh. It is the fundamental or general evidence that fiqh is based upon.

The science of uṣūl al-fiqh itself is based on three sciences:

- **The Arabic language**
- **ʿAqīdah/Uṣūl al-dīn**
- **Furūʿ**, *(the rulings themself)*

These are the three sciences that make up uṣūl al-fiqh.

As mentioned earlier, Imām al-Mardāwī has two important books in uṣūl al-fiqh.

He authored a book called *Taḥrīr al-Manqūl fī Tahdhīb ʿIlm al-Uṣūl*, commonly known as *al-Taḥrīr*. This was his first book in uṣūl.

He then authored a commentary on *al-Taḥrīr* called *al-Taḥbīr Sharḥ al-Taḥrīr*.

Ibn al-Najjār then wrote a summary of *al-Taḥrīr* called *Mukhtaṣar al-Taḥrīr*. He then authored his own explanation of this summary called *Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar al-Taḥrīr*, which is more commonly known as *Sharḥ al-Kawkab al-Munīr*.

These two titles refer to the same book.

If someone wants to know the muʿtamad, the relied-upon position in

uṣūl al-fiqh in the madhhab, he goes to *Sharḥ al-Kawkab al-Munīr*.

There are other books in the Ḥanbalī library of uṣūl al-fiqh.

One is *Rawḍat al-Nāẓir* by Imām Ibn Qudāmah. This is a Ḥanbalī version of *al-Mustaṣfā min ʿIlm al-Uṣūl* by Imām al-Ghazālī. This does not necessarily mean it gives the relied-upon position, but Ibn Qudāmah produced a Ḥanbalī version of al-Ghazālī's work.

We also have works such as *Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar al-Rawḍah* by Najm al-Dīn al-Ṭūfī, who died in 716 AH.

So to recap: if someone wants to know the correct position in uṣūl al-fiqh in the madhhab, he goes to *Sharḥ al-Kawkab al-Munīr*.

Qawāʿid

We also have the science of qawāʿid, meaning general rules.

There are two types.

The first is *qawāʿid uṣūliyyah*. These are general rules of uṣūl al-fiqh.

An example is the principle:

Taking speech upon its literal meaning is given precedence over metaphorical meanings.

Meaning, we take something upon its literal meaning unless there is evidence to do otherwise.

The most famous book of this type of qawāʿid is the *Qawāʿid* of Ibn al-Laḥḥām, who died in 803 AH.

The second type is the more commonly known type of qawāʿid, which are the legal maxims, or *qawāʿid fiqhiyyah*.

For example, in the Ḥanbalī madhhab we have a legal maxim that says:

"A prohibition implies invalidity."

This means that if there is a prohibition connected to an act of worship, its pillars, or its conditions, then that act of worship or whatever becomes invalid.

An example is praying in a stolen garment.

In the Ḥanbalī madhhab, one of the conditions of the prayer is covering the ʿawrah. If the ʿawrah is covered using a stolen garment, then according to the Ḥanbalī madhhab, the prayer becomes invalid.

When we say that something is invalid in the Ḥanbalī madhhab, it means that it did not even start. So if a person is praying in a stolen garment, then according to this position, his prayer has not even begun. He is merely standing and doing the actions of prayer.

The most famous work in qawāʿid fiqhiyyah in the madhhab is the *Qawāʿid* of Ibn Rajab, who died in 795 AH, may Allāh have mercy upon him.

There is some overlap between the two types of qawāʿid. So it is not

always beneficial to be overly strict and say, *"This is from qawāʿid uṣūliyyah,"* or, *"This is from qawāʿid fiqhiyyah."* There is overlap, and it is not always an easy matter.

The importance of learning qawāʿid is that it brings similar issues of fiqh together.

This is very important for someone aspiring to become a mujtahid in the madhhab. It allows him to see different issues of fiqh together and understand how the different qawāʿid apply to them.

It also facilitates the process of qiyās.

If someone wants to produce a ruling and he has five similar rulings in front of him, it becomes easier to produce a sixth ruling by analogy.

This is the importance of studying qawāʿid. It brings together important issues of fiqh and helps a person understand how to apply principles across different cases.

Furūʿ

The main part of the madhhab is furūʿ, meaning the issues of fiqh themselves.

We have already mentioned some of the important books for furūʿ, such as *Muntahā* and *al-Iqnāʿ*.

Later, when discussing the Ḥanbalī fiqh curriculum, we will mention more books. For now, the key point is that we do not simply go to the older books to find the relied-upon position. We do not go directly to works like *al-Muqniʿ*, *ʿUmdat al-Fiqh*, or *al-Inṣāf* to learn the muʿtamad as beginners.

Rather, we go to the later books, because they have been developed and served by the scholars, and they give us the relied-upon position.

ʿAqīdah in the Ḥanbalī Madhhab

A major part of the Ḥanbalī madhhab, unlike some of the other madhāhib, is that it has famous ʿaqīdah (also called uṣūl al-dīn).

As is well known, during the Miḥnah, Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, may Allāh have mercy upon him, became a representative of Sunni ʿaqīdah.

Therefore, the Ḥanbalī school has positions in ʿaqīdah.

The Ḥanbalī school is synonymous with the Atharī school, as the Hanābilah preserved, transmitted, and further developed the creed of the Salaf.

Scholars Not Relied Upon in Ḥanbalī ʿAqīdah

A final point in ʿaqīdah is that there are some scholars who are not relied upon in ʿaqīdah in the Ḥanbalī school.

For example, Imām Ibn al-Jawzī, may Allāh have mercy upon him, was Ḥanbalī. However, he is not relied upon in ʿaqīdah according to the Ḥanābilah, because in many issues he follows the Ḥanbalī way, in some issues he follows the Ashʿarī way, and in some issues he follows his own way.

In the main issues of creed, we do not make taqlīd in the same way we do in fiqh, because they are not simply ijtihādī matters. So he can go his own way, but we would not say that he represents Ḥanbalī ʿaqīdah.

Taṣawwuf/Tazkiyah/zuhd

Unlike some of the other madhāhib, the Ḥanbalī madhhab has a distinct wing in ʿaqīdah and also a distinct path in taṣawwuf and zuhd.

It is known that Imām al-Shāfiʿī said that Imām Aḥmad was an imām in eight things. Among those things, he said that Imām Aḥmad was an imām in zuhd.

From this, the madhhab has a way in taṣawwuf. This has mostly been preserved, handed down, and developed by the Qādirī ṭarīqah, the ṭarīqah of Sayyidī Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī al-Ḥanbalī. Major scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah were connected to this path.

This preserves the Ḥanbalī method of taṣawwuf, but it is important to separate modern innovations and practices from the true method.

Being Ḥanbalī in One Science and Not Another

Because the madhhab includes different sciences, a person can be Ḥanbalī in ʿaqīdah (commonly known as Atharī) while being Shāfiʿī in fiqh. It is not necessarily the case that someone who is Ḥanbalī in fiqh is also Ḥanbalī in ʿaqīdah, or that someone who is Ḥanbalī in ʿaqīdah is also Ḥanbalī in fiqh.

The sciences are distinct, even though they may be connected.

Ijtihād and Taqlīd

According to the Ḥanbalī madhhab, and the other madhāhib, everyone is either a mujtahid or a muqallid.

A mujtahid is someone who goes directly to the source material. He goes directly to the Qurʾān and Sunnah and is able to deduce rulings from them.

A muqallid is someone who does not have that ability and therefore follows someone qualified.

So you are either a mujtahid or a muqallid.

From the muqallidīn, you may be an ʿāmmī (layperson), or you may even be a very great scholar, but still technically a muqallid.

The category of *ittibāʿ*, which Ibn al-Qayyim spoke about, is not something that the scholars generally followed him in. This is where a person is said to be making taqlīd while knowing the evidence. However, according to this understanding, he is still a muqallid because he is still making taqlīd.

So there is no third category. A person is either a mujtahid or a muqallid.

This is important because it affects how one learns the madhhab.

The beginner or intermediate student is not primarily concerned with evidences. When a beginner learns fiqh, he learns the rulings and visualises them in his mind. He increases his knowledge by learning the different rulings of fiqh.

At this stage, he is not concerned with evidences or justifications, because this is too advanced for him.

This is why in the entry-level mutūn, the beginner books, the scholars usually do not mention evidences. They simply mention the ruling.

For example:

- The hands are to be placed under the navel.
- The hands are to be lifted here.
- The cleaning of najāsah requires seven washes.

You do not usually find the evidence or justification mentioned at this

stage.

Sometimes, however, scholars may mention an āyah or ḥadīth in beginner books. This is not usually because they are bringing the evidence so that the beginner can analyse it. Rather, it may be so that the beginner can interact with the sacred texts and attain barakah through them.

Asking for Evidence

This is similar to what we mentioned before regarding studying and asking questions.

A person may go to a muftī, scholar, or shaykh whom he trusts, ask a question, and take the ruling.

If he then goes further and says, *"What is the evidence?"* it is the right of the muftī or scholar to refuse that request. This is because the person came for a ruling and is relying upon that scholar precisely because he does not know himself.

Because the questioner is not in a position to properly process or understand the evidence.

It is very easy for a scholar to deceive a layman with evidence.

For example, a layman asks, *"What is the ruling on ṣalāh?"* The scholar says, *"It is obligatory because of this āyah or this ḥadīth,"* and he quotes a text in which ṣalāh is mentioned.

The layman hears the mention of ṣalāh and thinks he now knows the evidence. However, the scholar may have completely deceived him, because that text may have nothing to do with proving why ṣalāh is obligatory, they may just be virtues of ṣalāh.

This is why, when we begin learning fiqh, even at the intermediate stage, we are trying to acquire the rulings. We are trying to make taṣawwur, meaning we are trying to picture and understand what the ruling actually is.

We are not yet asking for the evidence, because at this stage we are not qualified to analyse it.

The Ḥanābilah mention this quite explicitly in their books regarding the mustaftī, meaning the person seeking a fatwā. You can find this in

works such as *Ṣifat al-Muftī wa'l-Mustaftī* by Ibn Ḥamdān, a very famous Ḥanbalī scholar.

Istidlāl and the Types of Evidence

The original author, Shaykh Yūsuf, dedicated a chapter to the types of evidences.

When someone seeks evidence, this is what we call *istidlāl*, meaning deduction or seeking evidence.

So the question is:

- How do we seek evidence?
- Where do we seek evidence from?
- From which sources do we find the evidence behind the rulings of fiqh?

One way is the direct way. This is to arrive at a ruling using directly transmitted texts, such as the Qurʾān and Sunnah.

This may be an āyah or a ḥadīth.

According to the Ḥanābilah, when certain conditions are met, the statement or position of a Ṣaḥābī (companion) of the Prophet ﷺ, may also be used.

It is also sufficient to mention here that the Ḥanābilah use weak ḥadīth in certain cases. They also use mursal ḥadīth in certain cases.

A mursal ḥadīth, in this context, is when a tābiʿī, someone who met a Ṣaḥābī, narrates directly from the Prophet ﷺ while missing out the Ṣaḥābī in the chain. In other words, someone who did not meet the Prophet ﷺ narrates from him directly.

We will not go deeply into ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīth here, but it is enough to know that the Ḥanābilah used these types of narrations as evidence within their istidlāl.

It is a very simplistic approach to think that the only evidence that can be used is an authentic ḥadīth, such as something found in al-Bukhārī or Muslim. The matter is much wider than that.

It is well known that the later Ḥanābilah, and even the Mutawassiṭīn, used weak ḥadīth in certain contexts. Imām Aḥmad himself used weak ḥadīth in certain cases.

This does not mean that weak ḥadīth are always used. Rather, Imām Aḥmad had a particular methodology and taste in this matter. For example, where there was no authentic text in a matter, he would sometimes prefer to use a weak ḥadīth over qiyās.

The point is that, according to the Ḥanābilah, it is too simplistic to restrict evidence only to authentic ḥadīth.

Direct and Indirect Evidence

Evidence may be direct, such as the Qurʾān, Sunnah, and statements of the Companions.

However, istidlāl can also be indirect. This is called *istidlāl bi'l-ʿillah*, meaning seeking evidence through reasoning or justification.

These justifications were concluded by the fuqahāʾ from the general texts of the Sharīʿah.

For example, wearing shoes when going to the bathroom is recommended. You will not find a specific āyah or ḥadīth that says, *"Wear shoes when going to the bathroom."*

However, the fuqahāʾ deduced this from the general body of the Sharʿī texts. One of the general meanings is that a person should avoid najāsah as much as possible. So when a person goes to the bathroom, one way to avoid najāsah getting onto his body is by wearing shoes.

So this ruling is deduced from the general texts and overall understanding of the Sharīʿah.

These types of deductions were not made by just anyone. They were made by the mujtahidīn of the madhhab.

So Imām Aḥmad, in our madhhab, did not only take rulings from the Qurʾān and ḥadīth directly. He also concluded general evidences and reasonings which could be used for rulings.

Taʿlīl: Reasoning Behind Rulings

When we do this type of istidlāl without a direct specific text, this is called *taʿlīl*, meaning reasoning or giving a justification.

Sometimes in the Ḥanbalī madhhab, even when there is a directly transmitted āyah, ḥadīth, or statement of a Companion as evidence for a fiqh ruling, the Ḥanābilah will also give taʿlīl. They will give additional reasoning behind the ruling.

An example is the prohibition of using utensils made of gold or silver.

In the Ḥanbalī madhhab, this is prohibited because of the directly transmitted ḥadīth from the Prophet ﷺ found in Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, where the Prophet ﷺ warned severely against drinking from vessels of gold and silver.

This severe warning indicates prohibition.

So the Ḥanābilah could have stopped there and said that using gold and silver utensils is prohibited because of this ḥadīth.

However, they went further and gave taʿlīl.

One reasoning they gave is that it breaks the hearts of the poor and needy. Poor people were used to seeing gold and silver as something valuable. If they then saw the wealthy using gold and silver not only for jewellery or wealth, but even for basic things like eating and drinking, this would hurt their hearts.

The second reasoning they gave is that it puts strain on the local currency. In those times, currency was not paper or digital. It was gold and silver dīnārs and dirhams. So if people were using what could be used as currency as plates and cups, this could put strain on the local currency and harm the economy of Muslims in that area.

So here we have a directly transmitted text, and then we also have reasoning to support the ruling.

The point is that when people ask for evidence, they usually ask for one of two things: an āyah or a ḥadīth.

But evidence according to our madhhab is not only āyāt and aḥādīth.

There are also the positions of the Companions, ijmāʿ, qiyās, taʿlīl, and other forms of evidence and reasoning recognised by the scholars.

Taʿabbudī Rulings

Another topic connected to this is taʿabbudī rulings.

There are certain rulings in the Sharīʿah where we do not know the reasoning behind the ruling. These are called *taʿabbudī* rulings.

These are matters done purely as worship of Allāh.

An example in the Ḥanbalī madhhab is the famous position that eating camel meat breaks wuḍūʾ.

If someone eats the meat of a camel, his wuḍūʾ is broken, and he needs to renew his wuḍūʾ before praying, touching the Qurʾān, and so on.

The muʿtamad of the school is that there is a reasoning behind this ruling, but we have not been informed of it.

There is a wisdom, a ḥikmah, and a reason behind it, but Allāh alone knows what it is.

This connects to what we discussed earlier about qiyās and using the reasoning behind rulings. We can only do qiyās if we know the ʿillah, meaning the effective reasoning behind the ruling.

In this case, we do not know the ʿillah behind eating camel meat invalidating wuḍūʾ. Therefore, we cannot use this ruling in qiyās.

So we cannot say that drinking camel milk also invalidates wuḍūʾ. We do not know the reasoning behind the ruling, so the only thing we can establish is that eating camel meat invalidates wuḍūʾ.

This is the muʿtamad position and the position of the majority of the Ḥanābilah: that taʿabbudī rulings have wisdoms and reasons, but we do not know what they are.

Ibn ʿAqīl, who died in 513 AH, held the opinion that the reasoning is that Allāh is testing us.

But the muʿtamad according to the madhhab is that we do not know the reason behind taʿabbudī rulings. We are simply commanded to do them, so we do them.

The Stages of the Student of Knowledge

We now move on to the final topic: the curriculum in the Ḥanbalī fiqhi madhhab, how the Ḥanbalī madhhab in fiqh is studied, and the importance of sticking with a qualified shaykh.

These principles are not specific only to the Ḥanbalī madhhab, nor are they specific to any one science. However, we will focus on the Ḥanbalī madhhab, especially fiqh, because that is the purpose of these lessons.

There are three stages for a student studying a madhhab.

- The first is the beginner stage, called the *ṭālib mubtadiʾ*.
- The second is the intermediate stage, called the *ṭālib mutawassiṭ*.
- The third is the advanced stage, called the *ṭālib mutaqaddim*.

The Beginner Student

A beginner is someone who does not yet properly realise the issues of fiqh.

In Arabic, we say that he does not yet have *taṣawwur*. Taṣawwur comes from the idea of forming an image or visualisation of something.

So the beginner may understand the linguistic meanings of the words in a fiqh ruling, but he does not yet understand their technical meanings.

For example, in the Ḥanbalī madhhab, there is a ruling that when a woman is left alone with a small amount of water, and she makes a complete wuḍūʾ from it, then although that water remains pure, it becomes ḥarām for men to use for wuḍūʾ.

There are more details to the ruling, but this is enough for the example.

When a beginner reads this, he may understand the linguistic meaning of the words:

- Woman.
- Alone.
- Small amount of water
- etc…

But he does not yet know the technical fiqh meanings.

When we say “woman,” do we mean someone who has reached puberty? Do we mean a Muslim woman, or does it include a non-Muslim woman?

When we say “small amount of water,” do we mean a literal small amount of water, or do we mean the fiqh meaning, which is less than two qullahs, approximately 200 litres?

When we say the woman is “alone,” does this mean she can be with a baby? Can she be with someone who is mumayyiz? Can she be with someone who is bāligh? How does the ruling change in the presence of any of these people?

A beginner does not yet realise these issues. He knows the linguistic meanings of the terms, but not the fiqh or technical meanings.

So what do we teach a beginner?

We teach him the technical meanings so that he can properly realise the issues of fiqh.

When a student understands that when the author says *"a small amount of water,"* he means less than two qullahs, and not a cup of water, and does this throughout fiqh, then the student has begun to reach the stage of proper realisation.

Once the student reaches this stage, he becomes ready to move towards the intermediate stage.

The Intermediate Student

The intermediate stage is where the student begins to be taught the evidences behind rulings.

For example, why is it not permissible for a man to make wuḍūʾ from a small amount of water left over by a woman after she was alone with it and used it for wuḍūʾ?

At this stage, the student learns the evidences.

These may be āyāt, aḥādīth, the positions of the Companions, or, as discussed earlier, taʿlīl, ḥikam, and justifications.

The Advanced Student

After the student has learnt the rulings, their evidences, and their justifications, he becomes a *ṭālib mutaqaddim*, meaning an advanced student.

This is the stage where the student can begin to refute other positions. An advanced Ḥanbalī student of knowledge knows the muʿtamad, knows the reasoning and evidence behind it, and can then defend the position of the madhhab. He can also understand and respond to the reasoning of other madhāhib.

This does not mean sectarianism. Rather, it is a stage in the study of knowledge. A student reaches a point where he can defend his own madhhab and use its reasonings to respond to another madhhab.

This is an extended stage. A person may remain an advanced student of knowledge for many years until he becomes a shaykh of the madhhab.

A shaykh of a science is someone who has become complete or perfected in that science, even if he is still young. In some sciences, especially in ḥadīth, the word shaykh can refer to an older person. However, in this context, we mean someone who has become complete in a particular science.

So these are the three levels, and every level has its own objective, goals, and relevant books.

The Ḥanbalī Fiqh Curriculum

Because there are three levels of students, the Ḥanbalī fiqh curriculum generally consists of three levels as well.

The curriculums that scholars give are not based on waḥy. They are not divine revelation and they are not set in stone. Rather, they are matters of ijtihād.

A scholar may have studied until he reached the level of a shaykh, and he may then have a curriculum that he feels is best for the students of a particular time or place.

Naturally, as the madhhab develops, the curriculum and the way the madhhab is taught also developed.

Having said this, some curriculums will be stronger than others. Some will be weaker, some will be less effective, and some may rely on less authoritative books.

For example, even today, some Ḥanbalī curriculums begin with ʿ*Umdat al-Fiqh* by Ibn Qudāmah.

At one stage, this may have been the ideal book to begin with. However, as we mentioned before, if we want the muʿtamad, it is generally better to go to the later books because the madhhab has developed.

This does not detract in any way from Imām Ibn Qudāmah or ʿ*Umdat al-Fiqh*. Ibn Qudāmah remains one of the most important scholars in the Ḥanbalī madhhab.

However, the madhhab developed after his time.

It is still possible that a teacher may want to begin with ʿ*Umdat al-Fiqh*. However, we would say that it may not result in the best progression for the student because ʿ*Umdat al-Fiqh* differs from the muʿtamad of the school in many cases.

Therefore, the teacher would have to spend a lot of effort going against the book in certain places. That effort could have been spent teaching more rulings instead of correcting or explaining where ʿ*Umdat al-Fiqh* differs from the muʿtamad.

This results in the loss of valuable time.

So when scholars design curriculums, they consider the most effective use of the teacher's time and the student's time.

The Beginner Level

The beginner level is called *mustawā al-mubtadiʾ*.

At this level, the student begins with mukhtaṣarāt, meaning summaries of the wider books.

The curriculum that Shaykh Yūsuf prefers and advises is to begin with books such as *Bidāyat al-ʿĀbid wa Kifāyat al-Zāhid* by Shaykh ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Baʿlī, who died in 1192 AH.

This book is perfect for the beginner because they are simple and easy to understand.

Another book that can be studied at this level, although it is slightly higher, is *ʿUmdat al-Ṭālib* by Imām al-Buhūtī. This is also a very good book to begin with, but better to study after *Bidāyat al-ʿĀbid*.

So a beginner would ideally start with something like *Bidāyat al-ʿĀbid*, then move on to *ʿUmdat al-Ṭālib*.

Shaykh Yūsuf has also mentioned many times that it is beneficial for a beginner to learn a number of these books rather than only one of them.

This gives the student the opportunity to learn more issues of fiqh, because some of these books mention issues that others do not.

It also means that the masāʾil are repeated, and repetition is excellent for revision.

This is the beginner stage, or *mustawā al-mubtadiʾ*.

The Intermediate Level

The intermediate stage is called *mustawā al-mutawassiṭ*.

At this stage, Shaykh Yūsuf strongly recommends focusing on Shaykh Marʿī al-Karmī's famous book *Dalīl al-Ṭālib*.

Dalīl al-Ṭālib is a very important book. One way we see its importance is that in every century after the death of the author, there have been numerous shurūḥ and ḥawāshī written on it. This shows that the Ḥanābilah gave great importance to this book.

So *Dalīl al-Ṭālib* needs to be studied at the intermediate level.

It should be studied with its best and most classical sharḥ, *Nayl al-Maʾārib* by Ibn Abī Taghlib, who died in 1135 AH. This sharḥ is also part of the Azharī curriculum.

So the most suitable option in the curriculum is *Dalīl al-Ṭālib* with its sharḥ, *Nayl al-Maʾārib*.

There are also other important shurūḥ and ḥawāshī on *Dalīl al-Ṭālib* that can be read alongside it and benefited from.

The most important ḥāshiyah is *Fatḥ Wahhāb al-Maʾārib* by Ibn ʿAwaḍ, who was mentioned earlier as part of the Ḥanbalī Golden Chain.
There is also the important ḥāshiyah of al-Dūmānī, who died in 1192 AH and was from Shām.

There is also an important sharḥ called *Maslak al-Rāghib* by Abū Bakr al-ʿAwfī, who died in 1094 AH.

There is also *Sharḥ Dalīl al-Ṭālib* by ʿAbdullāh al-Maqdisī, the nephew of Shaykh Marʿī al-Karmī, who died in 1091 AH.
These are some of the important shurūḥ and ḥawāshī that one can read and benefit from while studying *Dalīl al-Ṭālib* and *Nayl al-Maʾārib* with a shaykh.

Another option is to begin this intermediate phase is with a book called *Hidāyat al-Rāghib* by Imām Ibn Qāʾid al-Najdī.

Ibn Qāʾid al-Najdī was mentioned earlier as one of the scholars of the Ḥanbalī Golden Chain.

Hidāyat al-Rāghib is a sharḥ of *ʿUmdat al-Ṭālib* by Imām al-Buhūtī.

This makes it a perfect book for someone who studied *ʿUmdat al-Ṭālib* at the beginner stage. He can then study *Hidāyat al-Rāghib* at the next stage, building on the masāʾil he has already gone through.

Hidāyat al-Rāghib also has an important ḥāshiyah called *Fatḥ Mawlā al-Mawāhib* by Ibn ʿAwaḍ.
Here again, we see the relationship between the works of al-Buhūtī, Ibn ʿAwaḍ, and Ibn Qāʾid al-Najdī.

- Al-Buhūtī authored the matn, *ʿUmdat al-Ṭālib*.
- Ibn Qāʾid authored the sharḥ, *Hidāyat al-Rāghib*.
- Ibn ʿAwaḍ authored the ḥāshiyah.

These three scholars, along with al-Khalwatī, are part of the Ḥanbalī Golden Chain.

This set can be purchased together in three volumes. It contains *ʿUmdat al-Ṭālib*, *Hidāyat al-Rāghib*, and the ḥāshiyah of Ibn ʿAwaḍ. In this print, the top line contains the matn, the middle contains the sharḥ, and the bottom contains the ḥāshiyah, with all three works consolidated together.

There is a famous intermediate book that many people have heard of: *Zād al-Mustaqniʿ* by Shaykh Mūsā al-Ḥajjāwī.

However, *Zād al-Mustaqniʿ* is not al-Ḥajjāwī's masterwork. As mentioned before, his masterwork in the madhhab is *al-Iqnāʿ*.

Although some modern circles give a lot of importance to *Zād al-Mustaqniʿ*, the classical Ḥanābilah did not give it the same level of attention.

How do we know this?

We know this because we do not find many classical shurūḥ or ḥawāshī on *Zād al-Mustaqniʿ* until we get to Shaykh al-Buhūtī.

Al-Buhūtī, who is the shāriḥ of the madhhab, took *Zād al-Mustaqniʿ* and fixed many of its issues. He addressed places where the book lacked detail and places where it differed from the muʿtamad.

He authored the famous *al-Rawḍ al-Murbiʿ*. Although *al-Rawḍ al-Murbiʿ* is a commentary on *Zād al-Mustaqniʿ*, it became almost a standalone text.

A person could study *al-Rawḍ al-Murbiʿ* by itself at the intermediate

stage.

According to this curriculum, *Zād al-Mustaqniʿ* itself is not the best book to study in this day and age. However, *al-Rawḍ al-Murbiʿ* can fill the gap between the intermediate stage and the advanced stage.

So we can say that *al-Rawḍ al-Murbiʿ* is an upper-intermediate or pre-advanced book.

It is slightly higher than *Dalīl al-Ṭālib* and its sharḥ, *Nayl al-Maʾārib*.

So in the intermediate stage, one studies maybe *Hidāyat al-Rāghib*, then *Dalīl al-Ṭālib* with *Nayl al-Maʾārib*, then he may study *al-Rawḍ al-Murbiʿ*. But to reach this level in Fiqh, you need grounding in other sciences like Arabic Language, Uṣūl al-Fiqh, etc… not just Fiqh itself.

The Advanced Level

The final stage is *mustawā al-mutaqaddim*, the advanced level.

At this stage, there is really one book that is most suitable for the curriculum: *Sharḥ Muntahā al-Irādāt* by Imām al-Buhūtī.

Some scholars over the ages have tried to recommend *Kashshāf al-Qināʿ* instead of *Sharḥ al-Muntahā*. However, *Kashshāf al-Qināʿ*, the commentary on *al-Iqnāʿ*, is very large.

Shaykh Yūsuf mentions that it is something an advanced student needs to read, but it is too large to be placed properly in a curriculum.

When making or studying a curriculum, we have to consider the length of the book. If the book is too huge, it cannot be studied feasibly in a structured curriculum. Such books are more suited for reading, research, and reference once the student is qualified.

So the advanced student studies *Sharḥ Muntahā al-Irādāt*.

It is important that all the books in the fiqh curriculum aim to give us the muʿtamad. As mentioned before, it is very important for the Ḥanbalī student to stick to the muʿtamad, learn what it is, how it was formed, and what its evidences are.

Every book at every stage of the curriculum should be aiming towards that.

Other books, such as *al-Mughnī* of Ibn Qudāmah, are important books in their own right. However, they are more geared towards comparative fiqh.

Comparative fiqh is something that an advanced student should read later on. It is not something that someone should be reading on the way to becoming grounded in the madhhab.

Likewise, books like *al-Mubdiʿ Sharḥ al-Muqniʿ* by Ibn Mufliḥ are important for advanced students and shuyūkh to read, but they are not core curriculum books for someone progressing through the madhhab.

The Correct Way to Study

The correct way to study applies across the sciences of the Ḥanbalī madhhab, whether fiqh, ʿaqīdah, uṣūl al-fiqh, or other sciences.

Some books are suitable for beginners, and some are not.

Regardless of how beneficial a book is, some books are simply not for beginners.

For example, *Sharḥ Muntahā al-Irādāt* is one of the great reference works of the madhhab. But could it be taught to a beginner? Of course not.

This shows that certain books should only be taught at certain stages. It is important to match the level of the book to the level of the student.

This is the task of qualified teachers and qualified shuyūkh. They determine the level of the students and then teach them a book at the correct level.

Do Not Be the Architect of Your Own Study

It is vital for a student to know that he should not be the architect of his own study.

He should not rely on self-study, especially in the sciences of the Ḥanbalī madhhab.

Why?

Because, in general, the sciences of the Ḥanābilah and everyone else have been misunderstood and, in some circles, distorted. But especially there is a lot of misunderstanding about the Ḥanbalī madhhab.

Sometimes, even when certain modern groups reach the correct conclusions or teach the muʿtamad, the way they get there is different from how the classical Ḥanābilah got there. Their way of thinking and their approach to the sciences is different from the classical Ḥanābilah.

Therefore, it is stupid for someone to self study, merely read books, and then try to become a shaykh.

Of course, if someone reaches the upper-intermediate stage, he knows

much more than a beginner. He knows which books can be studied at which stage, and he may begin to read for himself.

But even at this stage, he still needs a shaykh.

Why?

Because this is the tried and tested way of scholarship.

In the Ḥanbalī madhhab, we say that Allāh is the true doer of all things. If a teacher is sitting and teaching, he is only metaphorically teaching. Any ʿilm and knowledge the student gains is coming from Allāh alone.

But the Sunnah of Allāh on this earth is that He placed scholarship and studentship within the relationship between the shaykh and the student. Even though knowledge comes from Allāh, the means to attain it is through this relationship.

This is something tried and tested. It is through this method that generation after generation of scholars have been produced.

So even if a person self reads, he still needs a shaykh to guide him. At some stage, the self reader must get his understanding checked by a shaykh or qualified teacher. The shaykh needs to verify the correctness of what has been learnt.

Shaykh Yūsuf mentions in his book:

Perhaps one of the greatest problems in attaining correct knowledge is not ignorance itself, but the illusion of having attained correct knowledge.

The problem is not always that a person does not know. Sometimes the problem is that he thinks he knows, but in reality, what he knows is incorrect.

This is called *jahl murakkab*, meaning compound ignorance.

One of my Shaykhs mentioned that he was reading a book in which the author said that, while he was studying the sharḥ of Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, many chains of narration and titles were repeated. So he said to his shaykh, *"How about I read these aḥādīth by myself, and if I do not understand something, I will mark it and ask you about it?"*

The shaykh responded:

“I am not worried about what you do not know. I am worried about what you think you do know.”

This strongly supports the idea that if a person wants to reach a level in the Islamic sciences, he must stick with a teacher.

The task of the teacher is not only to teach the student what he does not know. It is also to ensure that what the student thinks he knows is actually correct.

Without the student-teacher relationship, how can a person verify that what he thinks he knows is correct?

It is famously said that half a scholar is more dangerous for the ummah than an ignorant person. This means that someone who thinks he knows can be more dangerous than someone who admits that he does not know.

Sticking to a Methodology

The teacher-student method is a developed and progressive method.

It ensures that the student is gradually exposed to more advanced levels and that he builds upon what he has already learnt.

Therefore, a student needs to study under a qualified shaykh. If the shaykh gives him a particular curriculum or methodology, the student should stick to it.

If a person keeps changing between different methodologies, begins with one curriculum and then changes to another, this is detrimental to him. He loses valuable time and hinders his learning process.

This does not mean that a student must necessarily stick to one shaykh only. However, he should stick to shuyūkh who are generally upon the same ṭarīqah, meaning the same general methodology.

This does not mean a Ṣūfī ṭarīqah here. Rather, it means a general method of studying and progressing.

If there is a group of shuyūkh who recommend studying books A, B, C, and D, and they generally have the same way of understanding the sciences and progressing through them, then a student can stick to that group of shuyūkh.

But if a student spends half his time studying one curriculum and the other half studying a completely different methodology from somewhere else, then even if both methodologies may reach a similar end goal, mixing them can be harmful. The methodologies may differ, and mixing them may confuse the student and weaken his progress.

The Role of the Teacher During Study

Another task of the teacher is that, when a student is studying at a particular level, the teacher brings in relevant material from wider books.

For example, if someone is an advanced student studying *Sharḥ Muntahā al-Irādāt*, the teacher may bring relevant passages from *Irshād Ūlī al-Nuhā* and other explanations and commentaries.

The task of the teacher is that, while teaching the main book, he brings in relevant material from the wider works.

Naturally, the more advanced the book, the more reference material will be used. More wider books will be considered.

However, this is not usually the case with beginner books. With beginner books, the teacher will generally stick to the book itself because he does not want to overcrowd or overburden the student at that level.

Books are also taught differently.

The way *Bidāyat al-ʿĀbid* is taught is completely different from the way *Sharḥ Muntahā al-Irādāt* is taught.

It is not correct to teach an easy book in an advanced way, nor is it correct to teach an advanced book in an overly simplified way.

Each book has its place, its level, and its method of being taught.

Conclusion

This has been an introduction to the foundational principles of the Ḥanbalī madhhab.

In reality, we have only scratched the surface of these topics.

The aim was to give a basic map of how the madhhab works and how it should be approached.

May Allāh grant us beneficial knowledge, correct understanding, sincerity, and adab with the scholars and the sacred sciences.